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SUBJECT: QATARI INTELLECTUALS TO FELTMAN: PROBLEMS? WHAT PROBLEMS?

(SBU) KEY POINTS

-- (U) A small but influential group of Qatari intellectuals told NEA Acting A/S Jeffrey Feltman on June 16 that, despite differences in approach on certain regional political issues, the U.S.-Qatari relationship was comprehensive and strong.

-- (SBU) Dr. Shaykh al-Misned, President of Qatar University, said the "average Qatari" viewed the six U.S. universities, the military bases, and American companies here as emblematic of a deep partnership.

-- (SBU) Dr. Hassan al-Ansari, an Amiri advisor, explained that the Qatari leadership felt slighted by the previous administration, which only widened gaps in the political relationship. But greater attention paid at high levels to Qatar, a strategic partner of the United States, could help resolve areas in which we disagree.

-- (SBU) The group praised the President's Cairo speech, and Dr. Abdalla al-Thani, Vice President of Qatar Foundation, noted that plans were afoot to help President Obama implement elements of his vision.

COMMENTS

-- (SBU) The comments of these intellectuals track closely with what we hear from virtually all of our other contacts: differences in approach to groups like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Iranian regime are dwarfed by the rest of our relationship, including billions of dollars invested by American companies, billions invested by the Qataris in U.S. educational institutions, and billions invested in a strong and strategic military relationship.

-- (SBU) Given the insularity of Qatari society and governmental decision making, however, it is also true that these contacts, like most other Qataris, are probably not fully aware of Qatar's diplomacy with Iran, or Lebanese and Palestinian groups.

END KEY POINTS

¶1. (SBU) On June 16, Acting Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs Jeffrey Feltman met with seven influential Qatari intellectuals at the Ambassador's residence to hear their views on Qatar. Dr. Hassan al-Ansari, who is simultaneously a professor of political science at Qatar University, Editor in Chief of English daily "Qatar Tribune," and an advisor at the Amiri Diwan, took the floor first.

¶2. (SBU) Hassan explained that the Qatari leadership had felt neglected and disrespected by the previous administration, especially when President Bush visited UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in January 2008, "deliberately jumping over Qatar as if we didn't exist."

¶3. (SBU) An effort by the new administration to treat Qatar "like

the strategic partner that it is" could go a long way toward closing the gaps we have in our approaches to certain regional political issues, Hassan advised. "But even if we do not close those gaps," Hassan continued, "these are differences we can live with, given the strong relations we have regarding the military, education, and trade."

¶4. (SBU) Dr. Shaykha al-Misned, President of Qatar University and the aunt of Shaykha Mozah, the Amir's Consort, added, "And what differences do we have anyway?" To the average Qatari, she explained, Qatar and the United States have the closest possible relations. The six U.S. universities, the military bases and the American companies operating in Qatar are all emblematic of those relations, she said.

¶5. (SBU) "We all love the United States - we send our children there, we vacation there, we feel like we are part of it. Why would we believe otherwise?" Dr. Shaykha asked.

¶6. (SBU) Dr. Abdalla al-Thani, Vice President for Education at the Qatar Foundation, praised President Obama's June 4 speech in Cairo as an important step forward in repairing relationships across the region and the world. He advised that Qatar Foundation is working on a specific, large-scale idea to help implement the President's vision. Abdalla asked to meet soon with Embassy officers to share details of that plan.

¶7. (U) AA/S Feltman has cleared this cable.

LEBARON